

THE DASS INSIDER

A NEWSLETTER FOR SMU FACULTY

INFORMATION ON DISABILITY SERVICES AND ACCESS ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR STUDENTS AND CLASSES

SMU

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Campus Disability Initiatives: President's Commission on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities

Alexa Taylor



For over two decades, the President's Commission on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities (PCNPD) has advised the President of SMU on disability-related issues relevant to students, employees, and guests. The Commission, made up of staff, faculty and students with disabilities, meets monthly and ultimately submits an annual report on the Commission's work as well as future areas of concern.

This past year, the Commission raised concerns about campus readiness after a severe weather event, specifically clearing parking lots, sidewalks, and entries into buildings, which is of great importance for individuals who have mobility issues (e.g., wheelchair, walker, cane, balance). Other topics highlighted include efforts to install QR codes at automatic door openers that allow for quicker reporting of faulty equipment, the increasing federal expectations that all digital content be accessible to individuals with sensory disabilities, the need for additional faculty training on creating accessible course content, and a recommendation to create an accessible event planning guide to ensure campus event planners organize events in the most accessible way.

PCNPD noted trends in the following areas: increased demand for test proctoring at the University Testing Center (UTC) at high-peak times of day and during the term; growing complexity of needs for graduate students; growing complexity of needs for students with [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#), as well as a need for more education of faculty and staff regarding working with students with ASD.

Finally, the Commission celebrated several efforts on campus to increase accessibility: OIT received a letter of Digital Accessibility Conformance from [Allyant](#) for their work on the public website; the Commission financially supported bringing additional [MeSpace](#) units to campus for more sensory-friendly study space; the Commission honored faculty who received the [Extra Mile Award](#) from neurodivergent students.

If you have an interest in serving on this important Commission in the future, please email your supervisor and the current Chair, Dr. Sidney Gardner for more information.

Please join us for DASSapalooza on Tuesday, September 1!

DASS invites **all faculty and staff** for our 3rd annual event to welcome DASS students to campus and kick off our semester! We will have DASS staff on hand to answer questions, refreshments and new and returning students to share DASS resources. Please make plans to join us on **Tuesday, Sept. 1 from 4:30—5:30 pm in Blanton Room 303. We would love to see you there!**



DASS-a-PALOOZA

SEPTEMBER 1
4:30-5:30 PM
BLANTON RM 303

Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies is hosting it's 3rd annual open house. Meet our DASS staff and students and join in the fun with food and a raffle!

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DASS has a new Home!

This summer, the DASS Team moved to a new home. We are now located on the 3rd floor of the Blanton Student Services Building. Our address is 6185 Airline Road. Please come visit us!



Phone: 214.768.1470

Email: dass@smu.edu

Web: [The DASS Team](#)

DASS Student Perspectives

Criston Starks, Class of 2027

My name is Criston Starks, I'm a current senior getting my B.F.A in Theatre and B.A in Fashion Media at SMU, and I have epilepsy. I've had epilepsy since I was 4, but after going quite some time being seizure-free, I started having seizures again in high school. Since then, I've been learning to navigate college and adulthood with the disability.

I've had an incredible set of mentors and teachers at SMU who have not only accommodated my needs, but who've pushed me to become a stronger creative. However, I'd like to reflect on other experiences that might be improved upon to help the disabled students of SMU.

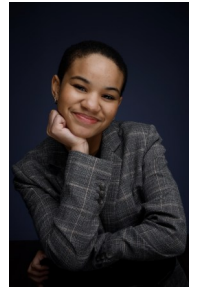
Epilepsy is what's known as a hidden disability, meaning at first glance you won't know I have medication side effects, different types of seizures, and different triggers. At the beginning of every semester, I let my professors know I have epilepsy. Many times, before I can finish, they say, "You don't need to tell me anything." It might seem supportive, but for me it's always felt a little dismissive. I do need to communicate for my own safety and the safety of my peers. The best response I've gotten has been, "Is there anything you need from me?"

Additionally, if a student doesn't come directly to you don't assume that they won't need any help from you. Rather than singling one student out, it's helpful when professors engage the entire class about their needs / learning styles. I've been lucky enough to have smaller class sizes with professors I feel comfortable communicating with, but many students don't have that privilege.

Overall, the key to a more accessible classroom is communication and listening rather than assuming. There's no one perfect solution, but I believe this is a great place to start.

As a student, I advocate for accessibility through the art that I engage with. While I have an incredibly intersectional identity, I'm used to only seeing bits and pieces of myself represented in current theatre, and my disability was rarely one of them. My experience with epilepsy has inadvertently caused me to seek more accessible spaces and representation for myself and others. With my time left at SMU, and post grad, I'd like to continue writing, directing, and acting in pieces that work to express the intersectionality of the world in the way I've experienced it.

[Criston's Meadows School experience](#) inspires other students!



Did you Know? Autism and Careers in Food Science

Check out these articles highlighting autistic chefs and their talents in culinary sciences.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/05/dining/autism-chefs-restaurants.html>

<https://chefsonthespectrum.autismspeaks.org/chefs/>

<https://accountific.co/blog/restaurant-inclusivity-employing-individuals-with-autism/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49PcUQtrqMk&t=1s>

Our DASS Office is Growing!

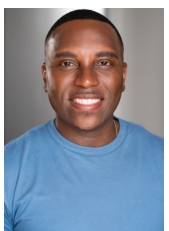
Michelle Bufkin



The DASS Team is excited to welcome two new team members!

Amra Sayed joined our staff in February as an Accommodations Coordinator. She works mostly with students with physical and chronic conditions as well as all graduate students. She holds a B.S. in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology from UT Dallas alongside an M.S. in Communication Disorders. She is certified as a Speech-Language Pathologist in Texas and a member of American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Her previous experience in both K-12 and early intervention settings shaped her approach to student advocacy.

Shun Colter, formerly with Student Success and Retention, joined our staff this summer as a Learning Specialist. Shun will be focused on providing academic coaching to SMU students. He brings over 14 years of experience in counseling, student support, and success coaching and enjoys helping students reach their full potential. Shun received his B.A. in Sociology from the University of North Texas and M.A. in Counseling from Prairie View University. We are pleased to have these new colleagues on the DASS Team!



Navigating Audio Recording Accommodations in the Classroom

Amra Sayed

Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) may recommend that students with qualifying disabilities, such as impairments in hearing, vision, processing speed, receptive language, or working memory, be permitted to audio record class lectures. This accommodation promotes academic independence and eliminates the need to rely on peer note-takers. Students supplement their own notes with the back-up audio recording in order to fill in where they missed critical elements.



However, this permission is limited to personal study and preparation, and students are strictly prohibited from sharing recordings or transcriptions with anyone else. These recordings are treated as academic sources governed by institutional codes of conduct, which cannot be used against faculty or peers whose classroom comments are captured.

To help formalize these expectations, DASS provides a [voluntary courtesy agreement](#) letter that instructors and students can use together. Faculty who wish to utilize the agreement are encouraged to review these parameters with the student and have them sign the form before recording begins.

The University recently implemented [a new recording policy](#) which clarifies issues which accompany the use of recording devices in classrooms. We encourage faculty to review this new policy.

Celebrating Faculty—2026 Extra Mile Awards

David Tylicki

[Students for New Learning](#), a student organization chartered by the Student Senate, provides support and networking opportunities to students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Since 2008, Students for New Learning, or SNL, has chosen deserving faculty members from across campus to receive The Extra Mile Award, recognizing their excellent teaching of those who learn differently.

Congratulations to the three awardees for this year's Extra Mile Award!



Dr. Ginger Alford, Lyle School of Engineering

Dr. Ginger Alford, Professor of Computer Science at Lyle School of Engineering, is recognized by neurodivergent students for her ability to make a challenging subject both engaging and accessible. They note that her passion for mathematics is evident in every class. Students appreciate the effort she invests in their success and describe her teaching style as both supportive and inspiring, and a professor with whom they would eagerly take courses again.



Dr. Nils Van Den Steen, Cox School of Business

Dr. Nils Van den Steen, Clinical Professor of Information Technology and Operations Management at Cox School of Business, was praised by students as an understanding, approachable, and accommodating professor, noting that he takes the time to connect them with resources and provide encouragement. Neurodiverse students especially appreciate that he fosters an inclusive atmosphere, ensuring they have the support they need while building confidence in their abilities.



Dr. Seth Orsborn, Cox School of Business and the Hart Institute

Dr. Seth Orsborn is the former DIG Director and Instructor in MADL. Students describe Dr. Orsborn as an exceptional advocate and mentor, but his commitment to neurodivergent students extends well beyond the classroom. He conducts research on neurodivergent-friendly workplaces and environments. He along with colleagues in the Provost's Office helped bring the sensory-friendly MeSpace study rooms to SMU, creating spaces where students can feel more comfortable and supported.

Faculty FAQ: Using the University Testing Center Proctoring Services

Q: What is the process for the UTC proctoring service?

A: We expect students to meet with each of their instructors to discuss their testing accommodations well before the date of the test. We suggest they bring a copy of their current class schedule to this meeting so that the instructor and the student can more easily determine the best course of action. If faculty members determine that they, their TAs, or another departmental representative are not able to provide the testing accommodations, then the student should be referred to schedule the test at the [University Testing Center \(UTC\)](#). Note that Dedman School of Law and Cox School of Business do not utilize the UTC, and instead proctor tests for students with testing accommodations in-house. For more details, please see the [faculty test proctoring page of their website](#), and the policies and procedures as stated on [the UTC website](#).

Disability Awareness Month Plans

David Tylicki

This October, as part of Disability Awareness Month, Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies, Academic Technology Services, and the Center for Teaching Excellence invite faculty to attend a student panel on accessibility, course content, and universal design. As the SMU students share their experiences, faculty will learn practical strategies to create an accessible course and support student success for a wide range of learners.

This is an online event. Register now via LibCal or SMU 360.

Event URL will be sent via registration email.

Please make plans to join us online on **Thursday, October 22 from 3:30—4:30 p.m.!**





As Part of Disability Awareness Month at SMU, join us for

STUDENT VOICES ON ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

A Virtual Student Panel

WHAT STUDENTS WILL SHARE

Experiences with course materials, Canvas, assignments, communication, and classroom expectations — from the student perspective.

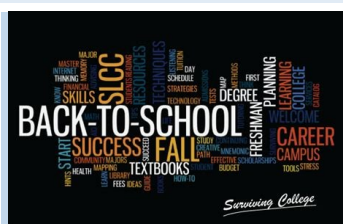
WHAT YOU'LL GAIN

Practical strategies for accessible and inclusive course design you can implement right away in your teaching.

Register now via LibCal or SMU 360
Thursday, October 22, 2026 | 3:30-4:40 PM | Zoom

SMU Office of Information Technology SMU Center for Teaching Excellence SMU Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies

Start of Semester Checklist



The start of each semester is a

good time to go over the basics related to DASS students and accommodations. The most urgent are making plans for the Syllabus Statement and reviewing Accommodation Letters on DASS Link. The complete checklist of items is found on our website under the [FAQ section](#).

VISIT US AT DASS

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Blanton Student Services Building
Phone: 214-768-1470
Email: dass@smu.edu
Web:
www.smu.edu/provost/saes/dass



DASS IS MORE THAN ACCOMMODATIONS.

For details on how DASS supports our campus:

[DASS Summary](#)

For resources that may be helpful to faculty and staff:

[DASS Resources](#)